

OPEN AND SHUT?

Wednesday, October 26, 2011

Interview with Nicola Rylett: InTech's response

Yesterday I posted an interview with Nicola Rylett, the marketing director of Open Access publisher InTech. I prefaced the interview with an introduction in order to give readers some background to the publisher. I now publish a statement and response from InTech to that introduction.

Underneath that is my response to InTech's statement.

InTech Statement:

In the piece, "The OA Interviews: InTech's Nicola Rylett", there were a number of valid issues discussed in great detail. However, despite a series of lengthy conversations which sought to not only address these historical issues but also to highlight the significant changes that InTech have implemented in recent months to eradicate said concerns, the author remains almost entirely focused on cases dating back as far as 2006. This, in our view, is an unfair representation of where the company currently stands, and this failure to shed light on more recent events with a balanced perspective may invariably lead the reader to a misinformed conclusion about InTech. We ask that readers persist with reading [this comprehensive article](#) which concludes with the full interview that Nicola Rylett, marketing director participated in with Mr Poynder – here is where the balance of the article is redressed, although it is questionable whether the reader will continue reading by the time they reach Page 17 of the piece.

The interview between Ms Rylett and Mr Poynder raised a number of important, pertinent and extremely interesting points that were not only relevant to InTech but also to the wider publishing- and- open access communities. The subject of peer review remains a hot potato among industry commentators, with advocates and critics seemingly at loggerheads over the extent to which it is enforced combined with its ability (or inability) to remain be the "quasi-sacred process that helps to make science our most objective truth teller" (Richard Horton, editor, *The Lancet*) and impartial, rather than err on the side of bias.

Finally, quality is another issue that needs to be addressed. While InTech has initiated a process of quality review within the organization in recent months, we believe the issue of quality per se is one that should be debated across the whole sector in the same manner that we need to openly deliberate how we can help increase the pace of transferrable knowledge in research globally, introduce innovative ways to meet and exceed customer requirements and expectations, and how we can maintain sustainability throughout the publishing community.

Article response, comments addressed as follows:

The statement, "Meanwhile it appears that no researcher ever received any royalties from the publisher," is an assumption made by the author and our non-response should not be taken as an indication of confirmation nor denial. This remains a confidential matter between author and publisher.

Value for money is mentioned throughout the piece and at this point, we would like to highlight the significant differences between the article processing charges (APC) among our contemporaries. PLoS, for instance, levy a c.2,086EUR APC, Biomed charge a fee of c.1,610EUR, while InTech's APC is among the lowest in the industry, between 590EUR for Books and 870EUR for Journals. It is also important to stipulate, as readers of the full interview will note, that there are variations with regard to the overall service provided for authors under the APC.

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The statement, "I asked Rylett to put me in touch with four or five authors who had been granted a waiver, which she agreed to do. At the time of writing this, however, I had still not been sent any names", is accurate. However, due to data protection protocol we can only forward author contact details upon receipt of their confirmation that they are willing to allow us to do so. We have sought permission from authors and will duly forward their information to Mr Poynder, as requested.

The statement, "Would not one expect the paragraph breaks to either be indented or double-spaced?" We have introduced paragraph indenting along with a number of other changes to the overall layout of our books which have already taken immediate effect, which will be evident upon publication of titles published within the forthcoming twelve months.

The statement, "And here is a front page of a book published in 2006," followed by the statement, "We might also want to ask why, given the undeniable difference in quality, an author would opt to pay to publish with InTech rather than publish without charge with a traditional publisher," seeks to convey to the reader that the company has failed to address previous discrepancies since their airing of said example some five years ago. This argument, in our view, has little conviction and it would be remiss of anyone to judge a company as it is in 2011 based on a solitary example dating back to 2006.

The statement, "What I do know is that InTech's critics have long maintained that it has a tendency to promise more than it delivers...the publisher is prone to exaggerate its achievements [and] are now inclined to conclude that InTech has succumbed to the same temptation in publishing and citing the new TBI survey," is the author's own opinion and not representative of the wider community. In our interview, both Rylett and TBI demonstrated the results of the survey in an open and transparent way and it should be noted that Mr Poynder has continued to refute its findings, which is his prerogative.

The statement, "In other words, researchers based in the developing world who know they will be rejected out of hand by the traditional scholarly communication system, either because of where they are based, the quality of their written English, or both", is the authors own opinion and should not be taken or accepted as a statement of fact. China and others members of the so-called BRIC nations and other countries have been largely unrepresented in the scientific publishing community, and InTech has enabled prospective authors who would ordinarily be excluded from doing so to have their work published and freely accessible. Language should not and will never be a barrier to becoming published with InTech - providing the quality is of the standard that we deem as acceptable. Indeed, it should be noted that like most of our contemporaries within the wider publishing community, we reject a significant number of proposals that we are presented with due to their failure to meet the required standards.

The statement, "Clearly one error InTech could make is to assume that it is enough to unleash on the world a plethora of upbeat PR messages and self-serving surveys, but omit to undertake the hard work necessary to improve its products, and to make the way it markets its services to scientists more acceptable," is 100 per cent true in so much that if this is the approach we were to take then yes, that will invariably be the consequences of the company's inaction. However, that is not the stance we are adopting. Moreover, as the interview below will testify, we have already made significant strides in recent months to review all areas of the way we do business (focus on quality, customer services, external communications, etc.) and reacted accordingly which will effectively dispel much of the criticism levied against InTech by critics once the seeds we have sown now come to fruition over the course of the next twelve months.

The statement, "...it is not clear that InTech plans to cease bombarding researchers with unwanted email invitations", is a gross exaggeration. Anyone with a basic understanding of marketing could never accuse an organization which sends fewer than 5 emails over a given twelve month period of 'bombarding' the recipient.

The statement, "Today, [InTech] describes itself – unfairly – as "the world's largest open access book publisher", is factual and not an attempt at self-aggrandizement. While there are a number of other open access players within our market, their focus is overwhelmingly focused on the publication of journals, with InTech operating predominately in books.

The concluding statement, "The problem may be that the particular niche InTech has created for itself, and the modus operandi it has built around that niche, may make it very hard to up its game without eroding its customer base", is an unfair statement and we refute the implication from the author which suggests that the quality of both our authors and publications is sub-standard.

(A print version of this eBook is available [here](#)) Earlier this year I was invited to discuss with Georgia Institute of Technology librarians...



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Babu Gedela

***Update: On August 26th 2016, the US government (Federal Trade Commission) announced that it has charged OMICS with making false claims. ...



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The Public Library of Science (PLOS) and the University of California (UC) have today announced a two-year agreement designed to make...

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Comment from Richard Poynder:

I appreciate that InTech took the time to speak with me in the first place, and to subsequently respond to my introduction. Below I address those issues raised by InTech where I believe a response is called for.

WIDER ISSUES

I agree that some of the issues I raised in connection with InTech could usefully be viewed in the context of the wider problems associated with the quality of published research today, peer review, and author-pays open access publishing; and I agree that there ought to be an industry-wide debate about this. Perhaps that is something that [OASPA](#) could organise?

I disagree that my introduction was “almost entirely focused on cases dating back as far as 2006”. For instance, I drew attention to quality issues connected with recently published books, including at least two published this month (e.g. [this one](#), and [this one](#)). Likewise, I drew attention to peer review issues associated with a book published last year ([this book](#)), and I also cited InTech’s [own survey](#) (published in April) in which respondents repeated the same complaints made to me in 2010, and which have been made historically about InTech. E.g. complaints that journal articles and book chapters published with InTech appear sometimes either be reviewed too lightly, or not reviewed at all. As one of those cited in the TBI survey put it, “If there would be a review process, the writing process would be more natural and the chapter could be improved.”

ROYALTIES

I can think of no publisher that would refuse to say whether they have ever, or do now, pay royalties to their authors. And why would they refuse? I invite InTech/Sciyo once again to answer the question I posed in the interview: Has it ever paid royalties to any of its authors and, if so, how much has it paid out since 2010 (without naming any authors, or breaching any client confidentiality)?

VALUE FOR MONEY

I agree that some Open Access publishers charge a higher APC than InTech. In light of the issues raised, however, some might argue that there is a danger here of trying to compare apples with oranges. It also assumes that the other OA publishers cited themselves provide value for money, which again some might question. As such, citing what other publishers charge may be to miss the point. The issue is this: what do authors get for their APC when they publish with InTech, and does that represent value for money; it is not a case of making price comparisons with other publishers.

THE TBI SURVEY

InTech says, “Rylett and TBI demonstrated the results of the survey in an open and transparent way and it should be noted that Mr Poynder has continued to refute its findings, which is his prerogative.”

I do not think it is accurate to say that I refuted the findings of the TBI survey. I aired the concerns of some OA advocates about the wider relevance of the survey, the way in which the results had been put into the public domain, and the selective way in which the data had been presented. Since I did not get answers to all my questions, I invite InTech again to address these ones:

- Why did not the TBI survey state that only 5,000 of the 8,000 respondents to a survey that had polled 25,000 researchers answered the section on InTech?
- Can the online survey that was used be made public?

RESEARCHERS FROM THE DEVELOPING WORLD

InTech says, “China and others members of the so-called BRIC nations and other countries have been largely unrepresented in the scientific publishing community, and InTech has enabled prospective authors who would ordinarily be excluded from doing so to have their work published and freely accessible.” That

Where is the Open Access Foundation?

While the term Open Access (OA) has its origins in the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), the concept and practice of OA has bee...

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is exactly the point I made. As I put it, "[O]ne could argue that InTech is providing a valuable service for those who are currently excluded from mainstream science."

REJECTION RATES

InTech says, "[W]e reject a significant number of proposals that we are presented with due to their failure to meet the required standards." I invite InTech to publish the figures on its rejection rates — for book proposals, chapter proposals and journal articles.

SPAM

It seems to me that there are two important issues to consider with regard to email marketing. First, the number of messages sent out and the randomness or not of the targeting. Second, the purpose of the messages and whether or not the recipients have opted-in to receiving them. As I understand it from InTech's FAQ, the publisher continues to trawl public databases for details of researchers, and then despatches multiple marketing emails inviting them to buy a service from InTech. It is not clear to me that all the recipients of InTech's messages have opted-in to receiving them. It also seems that many of them will not be existing customers of InTech. If that is not correct, perhaps InTech could clarify?

If it is correct, then I think it would be fair to say that InTech is sending out unsolicited commercial email, and in many legal jurisdictions this is subject to regulation. I don't know what the current law on spam is in Croatia, but I believe the country is expected to join the European Union in 2013. It is my understanding that Article 13 of the EU Directive on Privacy and Electronic Communications regulates the use of email addresses for marketing purposes, and it established an opt-in regime. As such, I am told, unsolicited emails can only be sent with the prior agreement of the recipient.


But I am not a lawyer, and I am sure that InTech has taken legal advice on this. It might, however, be helpful if the publisher could confirm that its email marketing activities are conformant with Croatian law, and that they will be conformant with European law?

WORLD'S LARGEST OPEN ACCESS BOOK PUBLISHER

My comment regarding InTech "unfairly" calling itself the world's largest open access book publisher was in fact a typo! It should have read "Today, [InTech] describes itself — not unfairly — as the world's largest open access book publisher". I will correct that in the PDF.

I assume that InTech's main competitor in this field is Bentham eBooks?

The introduction and interview can be accessed [here](#) (PDF file).

Posted by Richard Poynder at [15:25](#) 

Labels: [Gold OA](#), [InTech](#), [Open Access](#)

2 comments:

Arun Shanker said...



You have said "As I put it, "[O]ne could argue that InTech is providing a valuable service for those who are currently excluded from mainstream science."

Actually that gives an entirely different meaning I mean the words "mainstream science"

It is "Unrepresentation in the scientific "publishing" community" you should have said "mainstream scientific publications" and not "mainstream science".

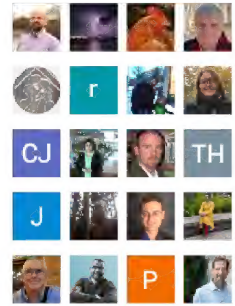
November 11, 2011 11:09 am

Anonymous said...

I think I will rather keep a blog instead of associating my name and reputation with InTech. I am a believer in open-access and I am willing to pay 1000 dollars for a good open access journals like PLoS or Nature Communications. But to put my name together with InTech is not I will do as a self respecting researcher.

March 06, 2012 12:45 am

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